



Sample file

INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO MUTANTS & MASTERMINDS!

Who hasn't wanted to be a superhero at one time or another? Who hasn't wanted amazing powers of super-strength, invulnerability, or—most of all—the power to fly? Superheroes have been a part of our culture for generations. They have become a kind of modern mythology — tales of champions and villains with powers and abilities beyond those of ordinary mortals, locked in a never-ending battle of good versus evil.

Superheroes have been a part of the world of roleplaying for quite some time, too. It's been decades since the release of the first superhero roleplaying games, which allowed players to create their own heroes and tell stories of their battles against the forces of evil. *Mutants & Masterminds* joined their ranks with its first edition in 2002, expanding the frontiers of d20-based roleplaying under the Open Game License. It was successful enough that a second edition of the game was released in 2005 and Green Ronin published over 25 support books for it over the ensuing five years.

Now this newest edition takes the game a step further. Whether you're a long-time fan or this is your introduction to the world of *Mutants & Masterminds*, you hold in your hands the key to limitless worlds of super-heroic adventure. All you need now are some dice, some friends, and your imagination to join the never-ending battle for justice!

You can get started with *Mutants & Masterminds* right away by taking a look at the **Secret Origins** chapter for different options on creating your own heroes, either from scratch using the game's system of power points, or working with one of the ready-made hero archetypes provided in that chapter. Gamemasters, you can check out the **Gamemastering** chapter to create your own adventures. Whole worlds of action and adventure are now in your hands!

WHAT IS A ROLEPLAYING GAME?

A **roleplaying game** (abbreviated "RPG") has players taking on the roles of specific characters in a story. In the case of *Mutants & Masterminds* it is superheroes in adventures like those in the comic books. In essence, it is like when you used to pretend to be a superhero as a kid, just with rules and dice, and sitting around a table with friends rather than running around in a homemade cape (although you can still wear the cape, if you *really* want to).

One participant in the game takes the role of **Gamemaster** ("GM" for short). The Gamemaster sets up the story, tells the other players what is happening, and controls the actions of the villains and supporting characters.

The other participants, the **players**, each take the role of a specific hero, the main characters of the story. Players choose their heroes' actions and reactions. Characters in the story controlled by the players are called **player characters** (or "PCs") while characters controlled by the Gamemaster are **non-player characters** (or "NPCs").

An RPG is a process of cooperative storytelling: the Gamemaster lays out a situation or scenario for the players, such as "you hear an alarm coming from the First National Bank!" The players then choose how their characters react ("We rush to the bank to see what's going on!"). Things proceed in a back-and-forth manner, with the GM explaining the unfolding story (how a supervillain is robbing the bank and trying to escape with his ill-gotten gains, etc.) and the players deciding what their characters will do (how one hero swoops in and stops the villain's getaway car and another tears off the car door, and so forth). In the process, the whole group creates an exciting story, just like you find in the comic books.

Like all games, roleplaying games have rules. The rules help determine what happens during the game: is the hero's attempt to stop the villain's getaway car successful? Is the hero strong enough to tear a car door off with her bare hands? With the game rules, the players and Gamemaster have a common frame of reference to decide how things go as the story progresses, hopefully helping to avoid the kind of "Did not! Did too!" arguments from childhood games of imagination.

All the rules to play *Mutants & Masterminds* are found in this book. However, you only *need* one essential rule: *if it makes for a fun and interesting story for your group, then do it!* No set of mechanical rules is going to encompass every possible situation, and sometimes the rules will return odd or even nonsense results. When that happens, feel free to overlook the rules and do what is the most fun. That's one of the advantages of a roleplaying game over a conventional board game or computer-game; you can bend the rules when they get in the way of the fun!



WHAT IS MUTANTS & MASTERMINDS?

In the Mutants & Masterminds RPG, you take on the role of a costumed superhero safeguarding the world from threats ranging from scheming super-criminals to alien invasions, hulking monsters, natural disasters, and would-be conquerors.

This book contains all the information you need to play the game. **The Basics** chapter starts you off with a quick overview of how the game works. After you read it, flip through the rest of the book and see the various options for creating heroes. Then you can read the following chapters thoroughly to see which options appeal to you the most.

CHARACTERS

The characters you create to play Mutants & Masterminds are like the heroes of their own comic book series, television show, or movie. Your character might be...

- **A patriot** subjected to an experiment to create a government super-soldier.
- **An alien from a distant world**, unfamiliar with Earth and human customs, protecting the world from cosmic evil.
- **A brilliant inventor** whose inventions might have served the greed of less honorable men had he not taken them and turned them into weapons in the fight for justice.
- **A teenager** coping with having strange powers in addition to all the other difficulties of adolescence.
- **An immortal champion of the gods** who has fought the forces of darkness throughout history.
- **The daughter of a legendary hero**, trained to follow in her father's footsteps, but longing for a normal life.
- **A master of the arcane arts** protecting humanity from forces beyond its ken.
- **An android** with abilities beyond those of humans, searching for the meaning of concepts such as "goodness" and "humanity."
- **A hell-spawned avenger** sent to Earth to visit retribution upon the wicked.
- Or anything else that you can imagine! The possibilities are almost limitless!

Take a look at the various hero archetypes in **Chapter 2** for some examples of different types of M&M characters.

SUPER-POWERED BY M&M

Mutants & Masterminds uses the Open Game License (OGL), allowing it to incorporate game rules and terms familiar to many players of roleplaying games. The OGL also allows other publishers to “borrow” and incorporate material from M&M and lets fans create their own M&M-compatible support material, such as websites or online games. Green Ronin Publishing provides a free license called Super-Powered by M&M for publishers interested in producing Mutants & Masterminds compatible materials. For more information, visit www.mutantsandmasterminds.com/licensing.

While Mutants & Masterminds has similarities to other OGL games, it is not necessarily compatible with them. It is designed as a complete stand-alone game system. For more information on the Open Game License, consult the copy of the license in the back of this book or visit www.opengamingfoundation.org.

WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

Here's what you need to start playing the Mutants & Masterminds Roleplaying Game:

- This book, which contains all the rules to create a hero and play the game.
- A copy of the character sheet (found at the back of this book). You can photocopy or scan it, or download a printable copy from www.mutantsandmasterminds.com.
- A pencil and some scratch paper.
- At least one twenty-sided die, available from game and hobby retailers. You may want to have one die for each player, or you can share dice.

Additionally, you may wish to have a copy of the *Mutants & Masterminds Gamemaster's Guide*, an expanded book on how to run the game, from creating adventures and settings to roleplaying villains and coming up with challenges for heroes. It supplements the material found in the *Hero's Handbook*, providing Gamemasters with lots of useful resources, but is not required in order to play or run the game.

THE DIE

Mutants & Masterminds uses a twenty-sided die to resolve actions during the game. References to “a die” or “the die” refer to a twenty-sided die unless stated otherwise. The die is often abbreviated “d20” (for twenty-sided die) or “1d20” (for one twenty-sided die). So a rule asking you to “roll d20” means, “roll a twenty-sided die.”

MODIFIERS

Sometimes modifiers to the die roll are specified like this: “d20+2,” meaning “roll the twenty-sided die and add two to the number rolled.” An abbreviation of “d20-4” means, “roll the die and subtract four from the result.”

MUTANTSANDMASTERMINDS.COM

Green Ronin Publishing maintains the website www.mutantsandmasterminds.com to support the Mutants & Masterminds roleplaying game. The website offers community forums, free downloads, sample adventures, and all the latest Mutants & Masterminds news and products.

UNDER THE HOOD

Throughout this book, you'll find various **Under the Hood** boxes (like this one). They take a look “behind the scenes” at the logic underlying design decisions and rules, and offer advice on how to handle common problems or issues that might crop up. They give you an inside look at how the game works and how to ensure you and your group get the most out of it.

PERCENTAGES

You can also use the die to roll a percent chance of something in increments of 5% – just multiply the value of the die by 5 to get a percentage from 5% (a 1) to 100% (a 20). So if there's a 45% chance of something, that's a roll of 9 or less on the die.

READING THIS BOOK

The best way to read the *Hero's Handbook* depends on whether you plan to be a player or Gamemaster in your Mutants & Masterminds game. The Gamemaster creates the world in which the heroes live and controls all non-player characters (NPCs) such as thugs, cops, and supervillains, as well as the supporting cast. Each player controls a superhero he or she has created, interacting with other player characters as well as with the world and stories created by the Gamemaster.

PLAYERS

If you're creating a hero for a Mutants & Masterminds game, take a look through the **Secret Origins** chapter for a basic overview. The following chapters contain all the information you need to create your own hero. You may want to consult with your Gamemaster before creating a hero to find out what sort of series your GM is interested in running, and what types of heroes are appropriate.

GAMEMASTERS

If you plan to be a Mutants & Masterminds Gamemaster, you should familiarize yourself with the whole book. Start by looking over hero creation in the **Secret Origins** chapter. Then read through the **Action & Adventure** chapter, and familiarize yourself with how to do things in the game. You may want to run a few sample combats using the archetypes in this book, just to get a feel for things. As mentioned previously, you may find the resources in the *Gamemaster's Guide* useful, particularly if you are a new Gamemaster or unfamiliar with Mutants & Masterminds.



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CHAPTER 1: THE BASICS

Mutants & Masterminds provides a framework for your imagination. It has rules to help determine what happens in your stories and to resolve conflicts between characters and the challenges they face. With it, you can experience adventure as a hero fighting against the forces of evil! Any adventure you can imagine is possible.

Like all games, Mutants & Masterminds has rules. This chapter looks at the basic rules of the game and how they work, giving you the foundation upon which the rest of the game is built.

THE CORE MECHANIC

Mutants & Masterminds uses a standard, or “core,” game mechanic to resolve actions. Whenever a character attempts an action with a chance of failure, do the following:

- Roll a twenty-sided die (or d20).
- Add any relevant modifiers (for game traits like abilities, skills, powers, or circumstances) to the number rolled.
- Compare the total to a number called a **difficulty class** (abbreviated **DC**).

If the result *equals or exceeds* the difficulty class (set by the GM based on the circumstances), the effort succeeds. If the result is lower than the difficulty class, it fails.

This simple mechanic is used for nearly everything in Mutants & Masterminds, with variations based on what modifiers are made to the roll, what determines the difficulty class, and the exact degree of success and failure. Remember...

D20 + MODIFIERS VS. DIFFICULTY CLASS

... and you understand how to play most of the game!

THE GAMEMASTER

One of the players in a Mutants & Masterminds game takes the role of **Gamemaster** (abbreviated **GM**). The Gamemaster is responsible for running the game—a combination of writer, director, and referee. The GM creates the adventures for the heroes, portrays the villains and supporting characters, describes the world to the players, and decides the outcome of the heroes' actions based on the roll of the die and the guidelines given in the rules. It's a big job, but also a rewarding one, since the Gamemaster gets to develop the world and all the characters in it, along with inventing fun and exciting stories.

If you're going to be the Gamemaster, you should read through this whole book carefully. You should have a firm grasp of the rules, since you're expected to interpret them for the players to help decide what happens in the game. You'll also help the players develop their own heroes, making sure they fit into the world and have potential for exciting stories in their own right.

THE HEROES

The other players in a Mutants & Masterminds game create heroes, the main characters of their own adventures, like an ongoing comic book or animated series. As a player, you create your hero following the guidelines in this book with the guidance of your Gamemaster. There are several components to creating a hero, described in detail in the following chapters, and outlined here.

ABILITIES

All characters in Mutants & Masterminds, from heroes and villains to the average person on the street, are defined by **abilities**, basic traits each character has to a greater or lesser extent. Abilities tell you how strong, smart, and aware a character is, among other things. The abilities are: Strength, Stamina, Agility, Dexterity, Fighting, Intellect, Awareness, and Presence, described in detail in the **Abilities** chapter (page 56).

Each ability is assigned a **rank** from -5 to 20, measuring its effectiveness. A rank of 0 is unremarkable or average, applying no modifier. Rank 2 is pretty well above average. A 5 is truly exceptional, while a 7 is about the most that can be expected from a “normal” human being. Beyond that is superhuman, and a rank of 20 is cosmic-level, far beyond the ability of mere mortals (and even most heroes). Abilities can even have negative ranks, for those well below average, as low as -5.

For more about abilities, see the **Abilities** chapter.

SKILLS

Abilities describe a character's raw potential or overall capabilities. **Skills** are a refinement of those basic abilities into specific areas of endeavor. For example, Agility defines how quick and agile your hero is, but the Acrobatics skill focuses on specific feats of agility like gymnastics, doing back flips, and so forth. Think of abilities as providing a certain baseline, while skills focus in on a particular area of expertise.

Characters are said to have **training** in a skill if they have a rank in that skill. A character not trained in a skill has no rank; only the character's basic ability applies to checks involving the skill. Trained characters have a skill rank that adds to the basic ability when making checks. In the previous example, we said Acrobatics skill applies to specific feats of agility. If

a hero has Agility 6 and is trained in Acrobatics (with a rank of 7) then the character's bonus for checks involving feats of agility covered by Acrobatics is 13 (6 plus 7). Obviously, training in a skill makes characters more effective at checks involving that skill, often *much* more.

For details on what skills are available and what they do, see the **Skills** chapter.

ADVANTAGES

Halfway between skills and powers, **advantages** are minor benefits characters have, allowing them to do things others cannot. They range from special combat maneuvers to things like financial resources, contacts, and so forth.

Many advantages have no rank, or rather just one rank; a character either has the advantage (and the benefits that it grants) or does not. Other advantages may have multiple ranks, like abilities and skills, measuring their effectiveness.

For details on the various advantages and what they provide, see the **Advantages** chapter.

THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT MEASUREMENTS

When using the Measurements Table, there are a few important things to keep in mind:

- **Each rank represents a range of measures.** Time rank 4 is actually all measures between 1 and 2 minutes, and time rank 16 is everything between 2 and 4 days! So if you're looking for a measurement that's not on the table, pick the next highest one that is; so 12 hours is a time rank of 13 (more than 8 hours, but less than 16), and 6 miles is a distance rank of 11 (more than 4 miles, but less than 8).
- **Like abilities, measures can have negative ranks.** In the time rank example, the time it takes a speed 14 hero to cover 30 miles is rank -1, or 3 seconds. You can extend the negative side the Measurement Table just like you can the positive side, with each lower rank halving the previous measurement. So rank -6 is half a pound, 1/16th of a second, and 3 inches, for example.
- **Don't directly add ranks.** Putting rank 4 distance together with rank 6 distance is *not* rank 10 distance! Rank 4 is a distance measurement of 500 feet. Rank 6 is 600 yards (1,800 feet). Adding the measurements, you get about 2,300 feet. If you directly added the ranks, you'd get rank 10 distance, or 4 miles! If you have different ranks, it is best to either handle them separately or convert them to measurements, add the measurements together, and convert them back to a rank. In the previous example, 2,300 feet is rank 7 distance (around half a mile).
- **Measurements are approximate.** Especially at the higher end, where each rank represents a wide range of measurements, the Measurements Table *isn't* intended to provide precise values; it's just a ballpark estimate so you have an idea of how things work in the context of the game. Don't focus too heavily on precise answers, just use the table for general guidelines.

POWERS

Powers are special abilities beyond those of ordinary human beings. They're like advantages, only much more so. Whereas an advantage might give your hero a minor special ability, powers grant truly *superhuman* abilities.

Those abilities are based on **effects**, which describe what a power does in game terms. A power may have just one effect or several, and you can apply various **modifiers** to the effects to change how they work, customizing them to get just the right power.

Power effects have ranks like abilities do, on a scale from 1 to 20 (sometimes more). Unlike abilities, effects do not have ranks of less than 1, since the "average" is not having powers at all!

Some power effects require checks to use, while others operate automatically. For full descriptions of the various effects powers can have, see the **Powers** chapter.

COMPLICATIONS

Finally, heroes often have **complications** to overcome. Overcoming such challenges is part of what makes a real hero. Complications range from physical disabilities or personal issues to unusual vulnerabilities. You choose your hero's complications, defining some of the challenges your hero must overcome in the game. The process of dealing with complications allows your character to be more heroic, discussed later in the rules. See the **Secret Origins** chapter for more on complications.

RANKS & MEASURES

Mutants & Masterminds uses the term **rank** when talking about the value of a game trait. So you might say a hero has "rank 8 Strength" or simply "Strength 8" (which mean the same thing), or that an effect is rank 5, 9, 15, or what have you. Every quantifiable trait in M&M has a rank assigned to it.

The game also uses a system of **measures**, real world values like pounds, seconds, minutes, hours, feet, yards, and miles, to name a few. There is a direct relationship between rank and measure, as shown on the **Measurements Table**. (You can find a metric version of the **Measurements Table** in the back of the book.)

USING THE MEASUREMENTS TABLE

The relationship between rank and measure has a number of uses in Mutants & Masterminds.

First, the capabilities of many traits are translated from their rank into a measurement. So the amount of weight a Strength rank of 3 can lift is determined by finding the equivalent weight measurement on the table, or 400 lbs. Similarly, the mass, distance, or time affected by various other traits, especially powers, is determined on the Measurements Table.